The House on the Left-Hand Side.

By JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

I.

I never thought that we should leave Northtowers. When we first went there it had seemed to me that we should only stay for a little time; afterwards it seemed as if we had put down our roots and grafted ourselves into the place. But in any profession where there is chance of preferment or promotion, one never knows when one may not be taken up by the roots and transplanted into a totally different sphere.

I had been just seven years a minor canon at Northtowers, when, by some extraordinary freak which I have never been able to understand, I got the offer of a living in Idlemaster. Now, Idlemaster is about thirty miles from Northtowers. In a sense, it is a similar kind of town. All cathedral cities are pretty much of a muchness; some are larger and some are smaller, some are gayer, some are duller, some have garrisons and some have not. If anything, Idlemaster is larger, gayer, more important than Northtowers, less sleepy, more go-ahead, and, as my wife put it, more desirable in every way.

I need hardly at this time of day introduce my wife to my readers. Although we had been married now for more than seven years, and she was getting on for thirty years old, she was not really much changed from the day that she came into the old house in the Close of Northtowers Cathedral. She had still the same sunny nature, the same love of a joke, the same disposition bubbling over with gaiety and innocent merriment, the same kind and tender heart, and the same sunny head running over with little curls. Everybody loved her, and when we announced to the good people of Northtowers that I had got preferment and was going to be a rector on my own account, the word went round that "the people" would like to give Mrs. Dallas a present. I believe, out of a sheer sense of decency, that they afterwards apportioned enough out of what they gathered together to buy me a silver inkpot. It wasn't very large and it hadn't cost much; in fact, it was but the surplus of the tea and coffee service which they presented to my golden-haired little wife.

Did we like the change? Well, I don't know. It put a couple of hundred a year in our pockets, a good deal more responsibility upon me and upon her, and I was my own master. I don't know that I had ever been dead set upon being my own master; I don't think I had ever troubled about it.

The Rectory house was new, or nearly so, and was commodious, but somehow it was not like the dear domicile just across the Chantry garden. Well, one cannot have everything in this world. It was quite true that I was beginning already to feel the strain on my voice—I mean the strain of continually using my voice in that large cathedral. In the little old church which was my new sphere I had no sense of effort. It was not work, it was child's play.

Well, in course of time we changed our Lares and Penates from the quaint old house in the Chantry Close to the staring new Rectory in North street, Idlemaster, and I fancy when we were thoroughly settled down on the whole we were the happier for the change. The man whom I succeeded had been preferred to one of the biggest livings of the county. He must have been a good man all round, because he certainly left his parish in admirable working order. I found it personally a little embarrassing to walk in his shoes, because he had used the feminine part of his congregation simply for all that it was worth, and the position was one that took a good deal of living up to.

"They are very starchy, aren't they, Joe?" said Rosey to me about a month after we had taken possession of the Rectory. "They are a much starchier lot than they were in dear old Northtowers."

"I suppose they are—yes."

"You know they are, you dear old humbug," she replied. "Think of that lot who constitute the Guild of St. Frances."

"Yes."

"Well may you say yes, Joe. Dear old boy, long as we have been married and much as I have loved you—and do love you—I must say that I never thought to see the day when you would come to be the Warden of a Guild like the Guild of St. Frances. What do they do it for, Joe?"

"Good works," I replied.

"I wonder what they'd say if they could see me at this minute." She was lounging back in the big chair which always stood on one side of my study fireplace waiting to receive her, her little smartly-shod feet crossed one over the other, and in the hand which lay idly along the arm nearest to me was a cigarette.

"I daresay plenty of them smoke themselves," I said, quietly.

"Perhaps they do. What a pity, Joe, you can't get your Guild transferred to New Zealand, or the Cape, or somewhere where they want good women to fill a natural sort of position. It isn't natural," she went on, warming to her subject, "it isn't natural to have forty-seven women all existing to butter up one man, not even when that man's you, Joe. There's something uncanny about it."

"Oh, they don't butter me up."

"Oh, don't they? They call you the 'dear Warden!' And yesterday morning I caught one of them ironing out your surplice. I felt quite embarrassed, being only your wife, and I took myself out of the vestry sharp. And then I came across another couple who were dusting out the pulpit. One sweet creature was down on her knees picking up bits of fluff off a hand-worked mat for your sacred feet to tread upon. Meantime, Joe, my boy, I'm a little puzzled."

"Are you, by Jove! are you? Well, I'm sorry for that, because you'll give me no rest till you've got to the bottom of the mystery. What is it?"

She looked at me with her clear, direct gaze, and drawing her brows down under the shadow of her sunny hair, said: "Who lives in the house on the left-hand side?"

"The left-hand side! What do you mean?"

"Well, you know as you go from here to the church?"

"Yes."

"A queer little street, half alley, half private road?"

"Well?"

"We know everybody who lives in those houses except one. I want to know who lives in that one."

"My dear child, how should I know?"

"Well, I know that you don't know," she replied. "I want you to find out."

"Why can't you find out for yourself? You are cleverer at that sort of thing than I am."

"Perhaps. There is what is by way of being a mystery in that house, Joe," said my wife, looking at me as if she would search me through, and with almost a challenge in her clear eyes.

"My dear child, it's no mystery of mine."

"Oh, no, you dear old stupid, of course not. But there's a mystery, and a mystery next door to my own church and within sight of my own house is a something," said my wife, very solemnly, "that I would rather die than not sift to the bottom!"

II.

I think we must have come from Northtowers with an exceptionally good record, for we received quite an extraordinary number of callers when we had once settled down at the new Rectory. Among others who came was a man who I had met once when staying a couple of nights at Idlemaster with a cousin of mine who was quartered there, being himself on the staff. This man was the senior captain of the cavalry regiment then lying in Idlemaster barracks. His name was Wilson King. I believe in former days he had been called "Chummy," but that was a name which had practically deserted him at the time of which I am speaking.

He came in one winter afternoon just as the admirable Vincent, who had followed our fortunes from Northtowers, had carried in the afternoon tea-tray.

"A cup of tea? Oh, thank you, Mrs. Dallas, I should like it immensely. Oh, no, nothing else, thank you, Dallas. I always drink tea at this hour. Muffin? Oh, of course, yes. Love muffins. We have them every afternoon in the mess."

He laid his hat and stick upon a chair and himself upon one just on the other side of Rosey's tea-table, and there he sat, a fine personal figure of a man with a good straight nose, long, straight legs, nice well-kept hands, and a pleasant, melodious voice, and discussed with her the entire social world of Idlemaster. He told her, among other things, that on the whole Idlemaster was a one-eyed sort of place. Then he told her the story of the bishop's little escapade anent his daughter's wooing. How the bishop had forbidden Miss Chatfield's engagement to Vernon of the Black Horse for no particular reason excepting that he wanted her to marry a parson, and how he had been brought to reason by the ingenuity of a young gentleman in the regiment whom he spoke of as the "Babe," but who, he explained, bore the name of Parker.

"I must bring the 'Babe' to see you, Mrs. Dallas," he said. "I fancy you'll like him. He's such a good sort. Very young, you know, and up to all sorts of monkey tricks, but not a ha'porth of harm in him—not a ha'porth, I assure you."

"And he brought about the marriage of the bishop's daughter?"

"He did, indeed. But for him, I believe she would be sitting weeping her eyes out in Idlemaster Palace at this moment; and Vernon, poor chap, would be cursing his fate—if he hadn't gone to the dogs long since."

"Do bring him to see me," said Rosey. "To tell you the truth, Captain King, after Northtowers I find this place terribly respectable."

"My dear!" I put in.

"Yes, I know, dear, I know. My husband," she went on, "is always trying to curb my natural levity, and to make me look as if I were ultra-respectable, which I am not. Poor fellow! he's had a hard task," she added, turning her radiant eyes upon me.

"Well, he looks pretty well under it," said Wilson King, most unsympathetically.

I could not help laughing. "Let me give you a word of advice," I put in. "You must take everything that my wife says with a grain of salt—no, I don't want to imply that she doesn't tell the truth, I don't mean that at all. The fact is, she hasn't got used to Idlemaster, and Idlemaster hasn't got used to her. When she does, she'll probably make the good people here sit up, and until they got to know her ways, she made the good people of Northtowers sit up also. She never ought to have married a parson, that's a certainty. However, that's neither here nor there. A parson I am, and a parson I shall remain, and my wife, like the rest of the world, must make the best of it. Meantime, she's desperately anxious to find out a mystery."

"And that is?"

"Who lives in the house on the left-hand side," I replied.

No one could have helped seeing the start which our visitor gave. "What made you ask that?" he said, with what was almost a stammer.

"Nothing, except that my wife is very keen on finding out the answer to the question."

"Mrs. Dallas isn't the only person who wants to know the same thing," said Wilson King.

"What!" cried my wife, eagerly. "Do you want to know too?"

"Yes, I do," he said, sturdily.

"But why do you? What interest can a house in a blind alley like this, a regular cul de sac, with only the church for an outlet—what interest can it have for you?"

"It has an interest for me," he replied, a deep interest. What interest can it have for you, Mrs. Dallas?"

"For me? Nothing but ridiculous, feminine, absurd curiosity," she replied, promptly; "nothing else. Must you go? Well now, when you come again, bring that boy to see me, will you? I want somebody to liven me up."

"I'll come with pleasure. Will any day do?"

"No," said she, "any day won't do. Come to-morrow night and dine with us, if you are doing nothing. It would be a godsend for us, because we are dining out four nights a week now, and a real mischievous boy sandwiched in between heavy clerical dinners will pull me together as nothing else in the world would do. Half-past seven, Captain Wilson—or shall we say seven o'clock and go in to the theater afterwards?"

III.

Until I heard my wife discussing the subject with Captain Wilson King, I had not realized that she was really devoured of curiosity concerning the house on the left-hand side of the Rectory Court. The Rectory Court was the name of the little cul de sac in which our new abode lay. It was a strange and primitive little corner, and our front door could only be approached by a narrow alley at the end of which were set three substantial posts, so that no carriage could enter in the court itself. Our back door opened upon the street, so that we were not compelled on a wet night to walk out by the front way and get saturated in doing so. The Rectory occupied the whole of one side of the court. Rosey's little morning-room was at the extreme corner to the entrance from the street, and its windows looked down the length of the court. Then came my study, with window facing at right angles to the morning-room. Then the hall, which was quite important for a house of that size; then the drawing room, which looked into the court at one end, and at the other by a large bay-window into our garden, the high wall of which continued the Rectory property until it met with the wall and railing which defined the limits of the churchyard. The entrance to the church—that is to say, the one which I always used and which led into the west transept and thence in to the vestry—was set cornerwise to the court itself. On the opposite side of the Rectory was a large and important house built endways on, that is to say, stretching very far back into a charming garden. This was occupied by a Mr. Winthrop, an old gentleman of wealth and of distinctly artistic tastes—he was, in fact, a collector, and might have been seen any morning prowling about the various little spots in Idlemaster for the acquisition of art treasures. Next door to Mr. Winthrop's was a pleasant looking house of no great size, but such an one as a widow of comfortable means might be expected to occupy. This had an old-fashioned bow-window on either side of the entrance, and three windows above. Its occupants also had a pleasant garden in the rear. Between Mrs. Blenkinson's house and the church was a very small house with one window beside the door entrance, and a couple of windows in the story above, and this was the "house on the left-hand side" which had so roused the sense of curiosity in my wife and Captain Wilson King.

"Rosey," I said to her, "why do you want to know who lives in that house on the left-hand side?"

She looked at me doubtfully. "I always tell you my secrets, don't I, Joe?"

"I hope so."

"Well, you know that I always do. I believe I shall be unwise if I tell you this one. And yet I never could keep anything from you. There's a mystery in that house, Joe."

"A mystery! What shape does the mystery take?"

"Well, it takes the shape, dear, I need hardly tell you, of a young woman."

"What is there mysterious about the young woman?"

"Well, there is something mysterious about her. She never goes out, for one thing."

"Perhaps an invalid."

"No, no, she's no invalid. She walks about the house—I've seen her. And the other night, when you were down at the night-school, I was sitting alone in the morning room, and she came out into the court—it was nearly dark, there wasn't a soul in sight, all was as quiet as the grave—yes, Joe, as quiet as those graves over on the other side of the railing—she came out, and she stood holding the railings, pressing her face against them as if she would try to get through into the churchyard. And she was crying, Joe—sobbing; not noisily, no, not making a vulgar noise, nothing of that kind, but crying. Oh, it made my blood freeze, it made my heart ache."

"What was she like?"

"She was pretty—oh, she was very pretty. And, by-and-bye, that older woman—you know, that one that comes to church and sits on the right-hand side, a little way down from the pulpit—"

"What, the one with the yellow feather in her bonnet?"

"Yes, that one; the one you saw when you called. She came and took her by the arm, not unkindly but very firmly, and made her go into the house, and to the last I saw that poor thing's white hand stretched out as if she was leaving her heart in one of the quiet green graves."

"My dear, why should you make a mystery of it? It is simple enough. She's a poor thing with a history of some kind, a screw loose in the upper story. Not mad enough to be put away, and yet not sane enough to let go about as she chooses. There's but little mystery in a story of that kind, Rosey. Don't trouble your head about it. By-and-bye you'll get to know the mother, or the sister, or the aunt, or whatever the stout lady with the yellow feather may be, and then you'll find that I am right. Poor soul, there's no more mystery in it than that."

I ought to have known my spouse well enough to see that she was not satisfied. She said no more just then, but the following evening, when the two men from the barracks were eating their dinner in our company, she suddenly asked Captain Wilson King, plump outright, why he, too, wanted to penetrate the mystery of the house on the left-hand side.

"You have seen those ladies who live there?" she said.

"Oh, what makes you think that?"

"Well, I did think so," she replied.

And then she suddenly turned the subject with an abruptness which told me that her head was very full. And from that moment she set herself to work to find out what was the mystery of that simple, innocent-looking little household.

Rosey managed somehow, in the course of a week or two to get quite on friendly terms with the lady with the yellow feather. Her name was Norreys, Mrs. Norreys. She told Rosey that she was a widow, and that she had not lived a very long time in Idlemaster. Yes, she had known our predecessors, but not in any way intimately. "I don't care to know people intimately," Mrs. Norreys ended.

"But you wouldn't call me 'people,' would you?" said Rosey, in her coaxing way. "Everybody knows me. I don't know why, Mrs. Norreys, but at Northtowers, where we lived for seven years and which is a place that I love, I was allowed to do things that nobody else in the town was allowed to do. It was most curious. If you let nobody else come to see you, you'll let me come now and again, won't you?"

"If we are of interest to you," said Mrs. Norreys, very stiffly.

Rosey went over and over again before she caught so much as a glimpse of the girl whom she had seen gazing through the railings into the churchyard. But, difficult as Mrs. Norreys was to approach, that wife of mine contrived to get round her in the end, and to her at length she confided her daughter's story.

"It's the most extraordinary story, Joe," Rosey cried, bursting into my study one winter afternoon just as I was lighting up my pipe after a round in the parish, "it's the most extraordinary story!"

"What is?"

"Why, Mrs. Norreys's. I have got it all out of her. My dear boy, would you believe it, that girl is only two-and-twenty!"

"My dear girl, I would believe anything. I have never seen the girl."

"Well, but she's living the life of an absolute recluse—of a lunatic. Her mother thinks she isn't sane. My dear boy, she's as sane as you or I."

"But how? Why?"

"Well, it seems that when she was only sixteen she fell in love with a man whose name she did not know, and he persuaded her to go out and get married. She was married—she doesn't know where, nor by whom, nor what the man's real name was. He promised he would come back for her in two years' time, and he never came. It's true that they left the house, and her mother never allowed her to communicate with anybody who lived in that town. The mother believes that the girl is suffering from hallucinations, and that she has never been married at all. She says, in a severe kind of way, that it is a bitter thing to have to say, but she believes it is nothing but a certain form of hysteria. The girl swears by all that's holy that she was married, and that she has seen the man since she has been in Idlemaster, but that, as she doesn't know his real name, she hasn't the faintest idea where to tell her mother to look for him."

"But you told me a long story about a girl gazing through the railing into the churchyard and sobbing as if her heart was buried in the green graves."

"Yes, I know, Joe, but the curious part of the story is this. You know as you stand looking into the churchyard from the court you can look right across and through the railing on the other side and into North street?"

"Well?"

"Well, she saw this man go past, and she's been watching for him whenever she's had a chance ever since. She's so pretty, Joe."

"Oh, you have seen her?"

"Oh, yes. So pretty and so sweet. And she's only two-and-twenty, and her mother will think she's a lunatic. My dear, she's no more lunatic than I am."

"Well, you are certainly not a lunatic, unless it is lunatic to be everlastingly taking a deep interest in the purely private and personal affairs of everybody you chance to come across."

"Don't be silly, Joe! How can I help taking an interest in the affairs of a girl who lives almost next door, quite next door, and who looks unhappy. Her mother worries her. Why, she never lets her go to church. However, I have given her a good talking to."

"You have?"

"I have. And she promised to let her come across to me alone you know, dear, quite alone at first, so that we may judge whether the excitement of coming across here—Joe, isn't it pathetic?—will do her any harm. And then——"

"Well, what is going to happen then?"

"I don't know exactly," said my wife, rather blankly. "But it will be good for the poor child, won't it? It must be good for her to come out into the world after being shut up and kept a prisoner for years. Do you know the reason Mrs. Norreys took that little house is because nobody can see into the garden, and that poor child has been four years eating her heart out within the high walls of that little garden, as securely shut out from the world as if she had been in Holloway, or wherever they take women prisoners to."

"Yes, I know, I replied. "It's all very well, it's a very pretty romance. If it is possible to weave a ha'pennyworth of romance out of a pound of sordid fact, you will do it, little woman. All the same, do you mean to tell me that the girl's mother, who is presumably a person of average intelligence and of more than average will power, has not taken every means to discover whether the girl really was married or not?"

"I tell you this poor child, Muriel, went away with this man and was married, she doesn't know where, she's not sure, but she thinks it was in London somewhere. She doesn't know what name they were married in, and she has never seen him since until she saw him the other day in this very town of Idlemaster."

"Well, it may be so," I said, doubtfully. "All I can say is that I shall be more inclined to believe the mother's story than the daughter's. Why should any man do such a thing? Men don't spring out of the unknown, make the acquaintance of girls, and go the length of marrying them unless they do it with the object of eventually living with them. Nobody marries without a definite object."

"But he was in love with her."

"Oh, he was? Well, that sounds rather more human than the rest of the story. But if he was in love with her may I ask you to tell me, as a reasonable woman, what object the man could possibly serve in marrying a girl and immediately deserting her?"

"Nay, that's a mystery. Muriel Norreys only knows that she was married. She got out from her school, she went away with the man, whom she had only seen some half-dozen times, and she came back again. She got into an awful row for staying out, and she never saw him again. Dear Joe," said my wife, "it's no use putting me in the witness-box. I can only tell you, dear, the story as it was told to me. If the girl is suffering from hallucinations I shall be glad to do anything which will restore her, even in part, to her own senses again. Mrs. Norreys tells me that she saw the schoolmistress at the school where Muriel was educated—at least, where she spent the last year of her educational life—and she absolutely pooh-poohs the whole idea; says it is neither more nor less than impossible that she could have been married, that she must have imagined it. Anyway, be that as it may, Mrs. Norreys has consented to let her come and have tea with me to-morrow, and she's coming, and that's all about it."

Pray don't think that my wife dismissed the subject from that moment until the arrival the next day of the young lady from the house of mystery on the left-hand side. She came quite alone, at least escorted across the courtyard by a smart maid-servant. It struck me that her clothes were a little old-fashioned, too. But it was a very beautiful face, and I confess, as I watched her, I did not see any sign of mental derangement, or even of mental want.

"Now," said my wife, "we shall not be really cosy and comfortable until we have had a meal together, so we will have tea at once. You like muffins, don't you dear?"

"Yes, we do sometimes have them," said the girl. "Alice told me that they make them in Idlemaster."

"Yes, dear, they make them here. I sometimes go to fetch them myself and bring them away piping hot, just off the iron plate on which they are made. Perhaps, later on, when we get to know each other we will go together."

"Oh, I should love to go with you. I should like to go to church," she added, fixing her eyes upon my wife.

"What! Have you never been to church?"

"No, never. I hear the service, you know—I hear everything from my bedroom window. When you open part of that window," she said, pointing to the window of the western transept, "I can hear everything, and if I crane my head I can see just a little bit of the preacher's sleeve, but that's all."

"Some day your mother will let you go to church with me," said my wife, in a tone of conviction.

"Perhaps," said the girl, quite brightly. She looked eagerly about the room.

"May I call you Muriel?" said my wife, suddenly.

"Oh, yes, do, of course. What else should you call me? Not Miss Norreys. How funny it would sound, like one of the professors at the school. I should almost expect you to call me 'young lady' if you went on calling me Miss Norreys long. Professors always call one 'young lady,' particularly if they are annoyed about anything. Mrs. Dallas?"

"Yes dear."

"What house it that? She pointed to a large photograph of our dear little house in the Chantry Close at Northtowers.

"That was our house at Northtowers, Muriel. I was so sorry to leave it."

"But you like this?" in a quick tone of alarm.

"Oh, yes, yes. This is very large and fine, but it isn't quite the little house at Northtowers. Nothing will ever be quite the same."

At that moment there was a ring at the bell.

"Oh, Joe," said my wife, "tell Vincent not at home. I quite forgot to tell her, and I promised Mrs. Norreys——"

She was too late. The door opened, and Vincent ushered in a gentleman.

"Captain Wilson King," she said.

He already knew us well enough to leave his hat and stick in the hall, also to be shown straight into whichever room we happened to be occupying at the moment of his arrival. He walked straight in and up to my wife.

"How do you do, Mrs. Dallas? It's awfully cold, isn't it? I——" and then he stopped.

There was a cry from the deep chair in which our visitor was sitting, a cry like that of a stricken animal. He dropped my wife's hand as if he had been shot, and, turning himself sharply about in the firelight, peered at the figure of the girl. She had risen from her chair and was standing staring fixedly at him. Of the two he was the first to recover himself.

He made a quick step towards her. "Muriel!"

She stretched out her two hands. "Oh, George!"

It was all over and done in a moment. Neither Rosey nor I had time to say anything. In one minute she was in his arms, his kisses raining upon her face. The next she had slipped through his grasp and lay a huddled heap upon the floor.

There was a little brandy and soda standing upon the little sideboard by the door. In a trice I had mixed some, but Captain Wilson King waved it on one side.

Don't give her that," he said, "it's the shock. She'll be all right in a minute."

My wife, who was already on her knees, looked across the unconscious girl straight at him.

"Captain Wilson King," she said, "what is this girl to you?"

"Mrs. Dallas," he replied sturdily, "she is my wife!"

Oh, need I explain it all? Hardly. These two, who had had their young romance, their young and foolish page of story, had met at last. When we all came to talk things over, it was very simple—a marriage that was to be a dead secret for several years, a sudden call to active service, the miscarriage of a letter, the parting of the ways, and hopeless search on one hand and equally hopeless imprisonment on the other.

"But why," said my wife, "looking hard at Wilson King, when he had taken the two ladies across to their own home, "but why, Captain Wilson King, when I told you there was a mystery attached to the house on the left-hand side, did you jump almost out of your skin, as you did? You knew she was there?"

"No, I didn't know. If I had even suspected that she was there I would have torn the place down to have satisfied myself of the fact. The truth was that only a few days before I was passing along the other side of the churchyard, and I thought I saw her in what must have been this court stretching out her arms to me. To tell you the truth, Mrs. Dallas," he went on, "I have thought about her so much, so often, I have tried so hard to find her, that I began to think my brain wasn't quite as steady as it might be."

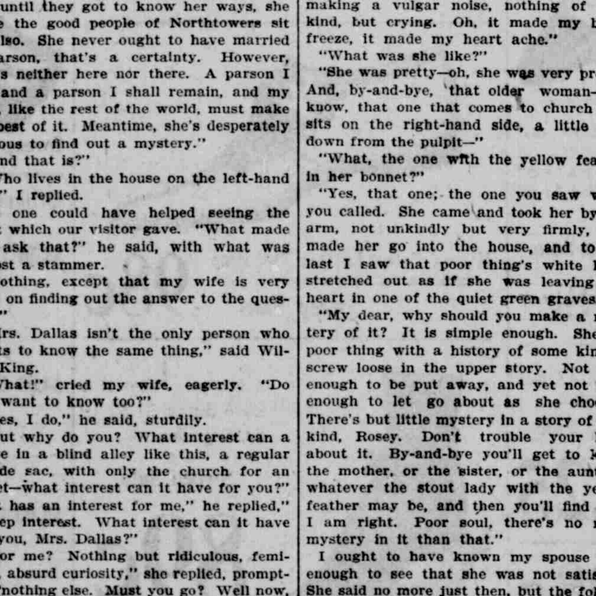
"And you thought the person you saw on the other side of the churchyard——"

"Yes, I did. I thought she was a mere creature of fancy, and when you told me that there was a mystery about the house on the left-hand side, my mind went back with a jump to that afternoon when I had seen her. That was all."

"One question more," said my wife. "How came it that Mrs. Norreys couldn't find any trace of your marriage, and that the girl herself didn't know your own name?"

"Well, by a mistake, she always called me 'Moore.' I may as well own up," he went on, reddening a little, "we got to know each other without any formal introduction. Mrs. Norreys could never have made any serious search herself, and the school people wouldn't—they only wanted the incident forgotten. My marriage certificate"—he took out of his breast-pocket a flat leather folder, and from this he brought forth the copy of a marriage certificate. "Here, Dallas," he said, "you know these things."

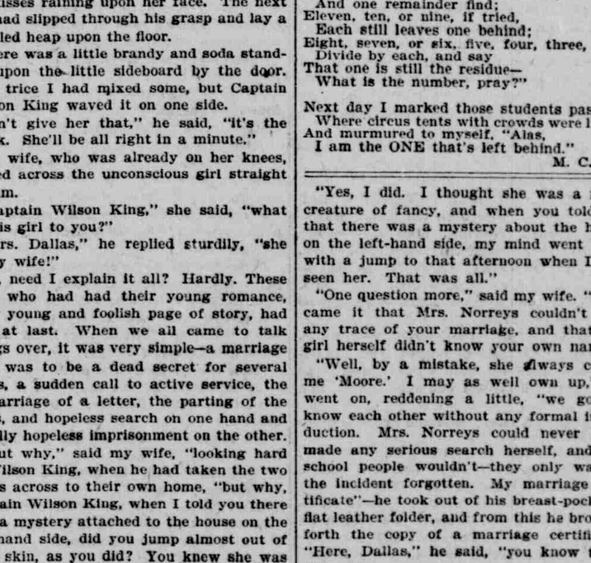
"Yes," I said, with a glance, "that is good enough. Well, old fellow, I wish you joy!"



SHE COULD NOT SEE.

Harold—Do you think it would be wrong for me to kiss you?

Mae—I don't know. Mamma told me to never let her see me kissing a man, but she's gone over to Mrs. Bixley's.



NOT WORTH THE TROUBLE.

Father—Don't you think you are too old to beg for a nickel?

Jimmy—That's right, pops. Make it a quarter this time.

Mr. Rockefeller and the Barrel Bungs.

Ida M. Tarbell, in July McClure's.

Rockefeller's supervision took account of the least detail. In commenting as usual on the monthly "competitive statements," as they are called, Mr. Rockefeller called the attention of a certain refiner to a discrepancy in his reports. It referred to bungs—articles worth about as much in a refinery as pins are in a household. "Last month," the comment ran, "you reported on hand 1,119 bungs. Ten thousand were sent you at the beginning of this month. You have used 9,527 this month. You report 1,012 on hand. What has become of the other 580?" The writer has it on high authority that the current version of this story is not true, but it reflects very well the impression the oil regions have of the thoroughness of Mr. Rockefeller's supervision. The oil regions which were notoriously extravagant in their business methods resented this care and called it meanness, but the oil regions were wrong and Mr. Rockefeller was right. Take care of the bungs and the barrels will take care of themselves is as good a policy in a refinery as the old saw it paraphrases is in financiering.

JOHN WESLEY'S CHARACTER.

He Was a Religious Man in an Irreligious Age.

July Century.

John Wesley was a religious man in an irreligious age. The religious man is the man filled with a sense of the presence of God and of the force of spiritual laws here and now. That, and only that, makes a truly religious man in any age and in any country. The form of the experience may vary; indeed, it may hardly be recognized as religious experience at all. Thomas Carlyle, for example, was a religious man; whether he was exactly a Christian or not may be a question. And when it is said that the age of Wesley was irreligious, it is not meant merely that intemperance, lawlessness, blasphemy, political corruption ran riot in society. That is true; but these flagrant sins may be found in any age, and the historian of morals is, perhaps, prone to exaggerate them. Certainly, all through the eighteenth century there were a score of deaneries and hundreds of rectories that were abodes of decent, sincere and comely churchmanship. But the good men of this time, the sincere men, were not, in the truest sense, religious. Bishop Burnet, for example, Addison, Swift, were good men, but not in the sense religious men.

The orthodox churchmanship of England when Wesley began his preaching needed nothing so much as that intimate personal sense of spiritual verities which it timidly branded as enthusiasm. Its belief was an uncertain balance of probabilities. Its motives were at bottom prudential. It could not speak with authority; it could not touch the deeper springs of action. Such a religion might be discussed, believed, even practiced; to talk of "experiencing" it would be meaningless. Moreover, a religion with so little of the contagious warmth of certainty could make no converts, could have no missionary impulse. "What is your religion, my lord?" some one asked Lord Bolingbroke. "The religion of all sensible men," was the reply. "Yes, but what is that?" "Ah, that is what no sensible man ever tells." The anecdote may be apocryphal; but it illustrates well enough the limited and individual character of the convictions most men then held upon the profoundest subjects. In fact, it is evident that the religion of this time had little influence even upon the lives of most who made an outward profession of it. No man could hold any civil office without taking the sacrament according to the forms of the Church of England; but it is said that not more than four or five members of the House of Commons regularly attended church. The universal prevalence of political corruption during the ministry of Walpole is proverbial. During the reign of Anne, the urbane satire of Steele and Addison had done something to bring into fashion a decent social morality and at least an outward respect for religion; but despite these influences, what called itself fashionable society grew steadily more lax in morals and negligent in manners. All the loud, ostentatious vices that accompany a rapid increase in wealth had probably never been so prevalent in English society as during the reign of the second George.

SPHINX LORE

Enigmatic Knots of Odd and Ingenious Kind for the Leisure Hour.

[Any communication intended for this department should be addressed to E. R. Chadbourn, Lewiston, Maine.]

607.—REBUS.

A peculiar kind of lawbreakers.

H. SEE BEE.

608.—RIDDLE.

"Suppose to-day were yesterday,
What would to-morrow be?"
I overheard the coffee say
Unto a cup of tea.
'Twas in a restaurant where I
Had paused to eat a bit of pie.

The tea made effort to reply,
But strained itself in vain.
This made the mustard very hot,
The answer was so plain.
The soup felt stirred to make a try
Till the potato winked its eye.

And then they put the question 'round.
They asked the oyster, too;
But sad I am, indeed, to say,
It put him in a stew.
They asked the waiter—it was dumb—
And every clam was quite as mum.

They laid the burden on the egg;
It meekly bore the yolk;
And so they gave the answer up,
They were not puzzle folk.
That's why I pass it on to you,
Kind friends, to give the answer true.

ARTY ESS.

609.—NUMERICAL.

Old 1 to 6 has traveled long and far,
1-2-9-5-6, ALL his aspects are.
6-7-8-9 attendants wheel his car.

At every 3 to 6 of annular tire
4-5-2-6-4-1, his ancient sire,
And horsey son his rivalry inspire.

Ambitious son usurps the inside track,
With kindred 1-4-7-3-9 to back;
Sad 1 to 6 rings for the other tack.

DELIAN.

610.—SOME NATIONS.

1. ******* nation is always in a state of alarm. 2. ***** nation is united in action. 3. **** nation is inactive and dull. 4. **** nation foretells the future. 5. ********* nation waits till to-morrow. 6. ****** nation links things together in order. 7. *** nation produces beautiful flowers. 8. ***** nation is heartily detested. 9. **** nation places a crown on the head. 10. *** nation delights to make presents. 11. ******** nation judges carefully. 12. ******* nation perceives objects which have no reality. 13 ***** nation is wrathful over men's actions. 14. ***** nation gives up its possessions. 15. ***** nation charms and captivates. 16. ******* nation appears in an assumed character. 17. ******* nation is given to violence and murder. 18. **** nation is powerful to rule. 19. ******* nation scatters broadcast. 20. ********* nation rebels against authority. 21. ******* nation corrupts and defiles. 22. ******* nation accuses him who accuses. 23. **** nation meditates on subjects. 24. ***** nation dispels all darkness. 25. **** nation sets one apart to a sacred office. 26. **** nation is subject to explosions. 27. ***** nation clears from obscurity. 28. ***** nation is in a state of decay. 29. ******* nation exercises decision and firmness. 30. ***** nation treats sacred things with contempt. 31. ******* nation engages in the act of total destruction.

H. A. W.

611.—ARITHMETICAL.

Said Master Sypher to his class,
"This problem surely need not irk us;
Each one who solves it, lad or lass,
I'll take to-morrow to the circus."

"A number now by twelve divide,
And one remainder find;
Eleven, ten, or nine, if tried,
Each still leaves one behind;
Eight, seven, or six, five, four, three, two,
Divide by each, and say
That one is still the residue—
What is the number, pray?"

Next day I marked those students pass
Where circus tents with crowds were lined;
And murmured to myself, "Alas,
I am the ONE that's left behind."

M. C. S.

612.—TRANSPOSITION.

A great Prohibitionist, wending his way
To address a temperance meeting one day,
Walked past a saloon as they rolled from a dray
A barrel of ONE, and it got in his way
As quick as a flash—even quicker.
This teetotal talker was no acrobat,
So his feet flew from under and downright he sat.
His SECOND went this way, his spectacles that,
On the sidewalk, bedraggled and bruised, he lay flat;
How the heartless bystanders did snicker!
His ailment was ruined from beaver to shoes;
He smarted from many a scratch and a bruise;
But he felt sorer yet, and it gave him the blues
To read the report in the next morning's news
That his downfall was owing to liquor!

A. F. HOLT.

613.—THE ALDERMAN'S DREAM.

An aldermanic candidate for a second term returned home from a stormy meeting, in which one of his opponents had taken as the text of his oration, "Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting." On retiring to bed our alderman had a dream. He was once more a boy, seated on the nursery floor. Strewn around him were blocks artistically shaped in various forms: 1. A form of a letter, the middle of the alphabet. 2. A circular form. 3. A form of a right angle. 4. A cylinder. 5. Three-fourths of a cross. 6. A hollow semi-circle. 7. A triangle on two feet. 8. A V-shape on one foot. 9. A pair of closed semi-circles. 10. One closed semi-circle. Building with these blocks, his hand appeared to be moved by some invisible force. Easily and swiftly the blocks were adjusted. They fitted together perfectly in the order mentioned (except that sometimes blocks of the same kind, viz., 3, 4 and 7, appeared more than once.) The creation, however, was of a nature so suggestive of accusation and menace that he awoke in a great fright, words of the invisible one still ringing in his ears: "Lo! the handwriting on the floor."

Interpret the dream.

F. L. S.

614.—CHARADE.

Two suitors proposed for the hand of Miss Scott;
One was a French baron, the other was Knott.
And Knott owned much more than he spent;
The baron was barren of TWO or estate.
And ONE Scott declared, as he shook his bald pate,
That Frenchman might win an American mate,
But not one American cent.

Our nobleman, having a title for sale,
Expected, of course, to be paid on the nail,
And stared in amazed discontent
When Scott, the stern TOTAL, refused to accede.
The baron retracted his offer with speed;
Both parties declined the alliance, indeed,
But Knott won a merry consent.

—M. C. S.

PRIZE NATIONS.

The sender of the best lot of "nations" answering 614 will receive Scott's poetical works in an attractive edition. The solutions are to be forwarded within one week, and in case of doubt preference will be given the neatest and best arranged of the nearest complete lists.

Excellent recent solutions are acknowledged from: Emma C. Humphreys, to 566, 568, 572; A. D. Preyer, 586; Mrs. F. G. Hackleman, 570; Nellie C. Stout, 586; B. F. Lester, 582, 586, 588; A. N. Drew, 586; Arthur M. Fogg, 582, 585; H. W. Milburn, 586; M. H. Luce, 586; a correspondent giving no name, 582, 586, 588; Mrs. C. A. White, 582, 883, 584, 585, 588, 589; D. F. Coburn, 582, 584, 585, 588.

ANSWERS.

590.—Microbe (Mike robes.)

591.—Veers, serve, reves, verse, sever.

592.—1. Temper-ate. 2. Met-a-physician. 3. Win-some. 4. A-long.

593.—A pair of spectacles.

594.—1. Reliability, liability, ability. 2. Commutable, mutable, table. 3. Domesday-book, day-book, book. 4. Application, plication, cation.

595.—These nonsenical lines.

596.—Edgar Allan Poe. 2. Daniel Boone. 3. Peter Cooper. 4. James Otis. 5. Washington Allston. 6. W. C. Bryant. 7. George Washington. 8. John Lovel. 9. John Armstrong. 10. Cotton Mather. 11. Gouverneur Morris. 12. David L. Swain. 13. Edgar N. Nye. 14. Lindley Murray.

597.—Fresh-man.